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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for your service to our country and for the honor of testifying before you today.

I am Audrey Kurth Cronin, Distinguished Professor at American University in Washington, D.C. and Director of the Center for Security, Innovation, and New Technology. I come from a proud U.S. Navy family whose father and three brothers all served, and my career has combined both academic positions and government service. I have been director of the core course on War and Statecraft at the U.S. National War College and Specialist in Terrorism at the Congressional Research Service. I have served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy and in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. I am an award-winning author on terrorism and extremism. My best-known book, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (2009),<sup>1</sup> was written in answer to a question posed to me by a senior Senator in the aftermath of 9/11. My latest book, *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists* (2020),<sup>2</sup> analyzes the risks and opportunities of emerging technologies, especially their use by terrorists and extremists. I am testifying on the basis of decades of experience researching terrorism and extremism, working with the military, and serving in both the executive and legislative branches.

The violent extremism that erupted during the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the U.S. Capitol had a disproportionate number of current or former members of the U.S. Armed Forces leading the mob. Protesters exploited both traditional and digital communications at unprecedented scale and speed. The images of Americans storming the citadel of our democracy, threatening elected Members of Congress and their staffs on January 6<sup>th</sup>, were alarming enough. But as FBI investigations now generate a flood of indictments, further troubling signs of extremism in the military are coming into focus and resonating with the public. Nothing is more threatening to a democracy than the military interfering in the peaceful transfer of power. But the evolving technological context in which this event occurred is also pertinent. The United States has experienced a tectonic shift in communications that affects the Armed Forces just as it does every other element of society. We must protect our Service members and veterans from nefarious actors using digital means to manipulate their trust.

Protecting patriotic Service members who serve honorably and deserve our support, even as we mitigate the problem of violent extremism in the ranks, will be a long-term test. Educating and engaging our veterans is also vital. The speed at which people are radicalized and mobilized via digital media has ramped up. That trend is heightening extremism and will not reverse itself because it is part of a new technological environment. To meet this challenge, we must first collect accurate data to assess the extent of the military's problem objectively, then devise a comprehensive plan to address it, and ultimately institute trackable policies that are tailored to the digital age.

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<sup>1</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Power to the People: How Open Technology Innovation is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

## Background

Military veterans were prominent in planning and executing the 2021 attack on the Capitol, often in a leadership role. Three militia organizations stand out in particular: Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and the Three Percenters. These organizations mimic the structures of our military, hijack and disfigure its tenets, and prize its skills. The Oath Keepers, named for members' professed intent to protect the Constitution, played a central organizing role in the attack. It was founded by Stewart Rhodes, a former U.S. Army paratrooper. The group has a formal structure of leaders, membership, and dues, and it makes the recruitment of military and law enforcement a priority.<sup>3</sup> Three of four Proud Boy members charged this month with conspiring over the encrypted channel "Boots on the Ground" in advance of the attacks were veterans.<sup>4</sup> Another paramilitary group, the Three Percenters ("III%"), named for the belief that only three percent of the American colonists fought the British, aggressively recruits veterans.

Information emerging in charging documents has been shocking: A retired Air Force veteran, Larry Randall Brock, Jr., photographed on the floor of the Senate holding zip ties, posted a phrase from the Oath of Enlistment on his Facebook page: "Against all enemies, foreign and domestic."<sup>5</sup> A retired Army Green Beret with more than 20 years of service was charged with assaulting a D.C. police officer by throwing an American flag at him like a spear.<sup>6</sup> And a Marine Corps veteran and retired New York police officer allegedly used a flagpole with a large Marine Corps flag on it to beat a D.C. police officer.<sup>7</sup>

At this writing, prosecutors have charged at least 312 people in the January 6<sup>th</sup> assault, of whom thirty-seven are current or former military.<sup>8</sup> Nearly half of military-linked alleged perpetrators are veterans of the U.S. Marine Corps (18), almost a third served in the U.S. Army (11), two in the U.S. Air Force, and two in the U.S. Navy.<sup>9</sup> Three of those accused are active-duty enlisted (two in the U.S. Army Reserve, one in the U.S. National Guard), and one additional person's Service is unconfirmed.<sup>10</sup> Veterans make up only about 7% of the U.S. population as a

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<sup>3</sup> Veterans Fortify the Ranks of Militias Aligned with Trump's Views," *The New York Times*, 11 September 2020; at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/us/politics/veterans-trump-protests-militias.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer S. Hsu and Rachel Weiner, "Proud Boys Conspired in Multiple Encrypted Channels ahead of Jan. 6 Riot, Fearing Criminal Gang Charges, U.S. Alleges," *Washington Post*, 19 March 2021; at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/capitol-riots-indictment-proud-boys/2021/03/18/971da624-8770-11eb-82bc-e58213caa38e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/capitol-riots-indictment-proud-boys/2021/03/18/971da624-8770-11eb-82bc-e58213caa38e_story.html).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government Detention Exhibits, Larry Randall Brock, Jr., George Washington Program on Extremism; at <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Larry%20Rendall%20Brock%20Government%20Detention%20Exhibits.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Rempfer, "Retired Green Beret Assaulted Cop with Flagpole during Capitol Riot, Charges Allege," *Army Times*, 19 March 2021; at <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2021/03/19/retired-green-beret-assaulted-cop-with-flagpole-during-capitol-riot-charges-allege/>.

<sup>7</sup> Insider searchable data base, at <https://www.insider.com/all-the-us-capitol-pro-trump-riot-arrests-charges-names-2021-1>.

<sup>8</sup> "Over 300 Charged from more than 40 States: What We Know about the 'Unprecedented' Capitol Riot Arrests," *cbsnews.com*, 18 March 2021; at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/capitol-riot-arrests-2021-03-18/>.

<sup>9</sup> Gina Harkins and Hope Hodge Seck, *Military.com*, 26 February 2021; at <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/02/26/marines-infantry-most-highly-represented-among-veterans-arrested-after-capitol-riot.html>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

whole but about 10% of accused insurrectionists, especially those who organized and led the siege.

Before January 6th, there was anecdotal evidence about connections between the U.S. military and extremist groups. In its 2020 report to the Committee on Armed Services about how well those who seek to enlist are screened, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness described military involvement in the Neo-Nazi groups Identity EVROPA (now called the American Identity Movement) and the Atomwaffen Division, the Boogaloo movement, and in other White nationalist assemblies. The report also exhibited a series of tattoos, symbols, flags, and posters appearing in photographs of military members. Included was a transcript of Brandon Russell, a U.S. National Guard Member and co-founder of Atomwaffen Division, bragging on the online “Iron March” forum about how easy it was to share White supremacist views in the military. Claimed Russell: “I was 100% open about everything with the friends I made at training. They know about it all.”<sup>11</sup> Focused on screening recruits, however, the report did not analyze how widespread the problem is, noting that “The number of current and former military personnel who ascribe to White supremacist and nationalist identity is unknown.”<sup>12</sup>

There have been other apparent signs of growing extremism in the ranks. According to a 2019 survey of 1,630 active-duty *Military Times* subscribers, more than a third (36%) of respondents had seen evidence of White supremacist and racist ideologies in the military, a significant increase over the 22% who reported this the year before.<sup>13</sup> In 2020, 57% of minority troops polled said they had personally experienced some form of racist or White supremacist behavior.<sup>14</sup> But these are surveys performed by a newspaper based on voluntary participation by readers, so the results are unscientific. We cannot consider them an accurate or comprehensive reflection of the state of the force overall.

Looking at it from another direction, the percentage of veterans who are members of extremist right-wing groups or anti-government militias has long been higher than in the general population. This is logical because extremist groups place a premium on military tactical and operational skills and try to attract former military members. Groups such as the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and Three Percenters also encourage current members to join the military to get training and experience, which raises their status and credibility. This training includes tactical skills and weapons use and specialized things like communications or cyber expertise. When

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<sup>11</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, *Report to the Armed Services Committees on Screening Individuals Who Seek to Enlist in the Armed Forces*, OPA Report No. 2020-080-0, June 2020, p. 21; and John M. Donnelly, “Pentagon Report Reveals Inroads White Supremacists Have Made in Military,” *CQ Roll Call*, 16 February 2021; at <https://www.rollcall.com/2021/02/16/pentagon-report-reveals-inroads-white-supremacists-have-made-in-military/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote 7, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Leo Shane, “Signs of White Supremacy, Extremism Up Again in Poll of Active-Duty Troops,” *Military Times*, 6 February 2020; at <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>. In answering a similar question on a 2020 poll, only 31% of active-duty members saw signs of extremist behavior, so a decrease of 5% but still well over the 2018 level.

<sup>14</sup> Leo Shane, “Troops: White Nationalism a National Security Threat Equal to ISIS, Al Qaeda,” *Military Times*, 3 September 2020; at <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/09/03/troops-white-nationalism-a-national-security-threat-equal-to-isis-al-qaeda/>.

current extremists do join, other military members, especially impressionable young recruits, may be vulnerable to their influence.

But we must be cautious not to fault the Services for what is also a broader American societal problem. Many of those charged in the Capitol assault were military “wannabes,” people who had tried to join the military and were screened out, or who had gone through basic training and washed out. The system worked. Some claimed to be military trained, members of an elite “patriot army,” but had no actual military connection. And the degree to which the Services control their former members should not be overstated: veterans are private citizens and, apart from potentially withdrawing retirement benefits from officers, the military has no leverage or control over what they do. It is unrealistic to insist that our military leaders and organizations take full responsibility for correcting a problem that has grown nationwide and has become part of our civic landscape.

Senior leaders are setting the tone, strongly affirming that racism and domestic violent extremism will not be tolerated in the Armed Services. In early February 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered a military standdown and explained the seriousness of the problem. “Unfortunately, extremism not new to our country or our military,” Secretary Austin said. “What is new,” he added, “is the speed and pervasiveness with which extremism ideology can spread today thanks to social media and the aggressive, organized, and emboldened attitude many of these hate groups and their sympathizers are now applying to their recruitment and for their operations.” Secretary Austin concluded by asking Service members to share their experiences in encountering extremists and their ideas about how to stamp out extremist ideologies in the ranks, to rebuild, “the bonds of trust upon which we all rely.”<sup>15</sup>

Addressing extremism in the U.S. Armed Forces is also vital because trust in the military is declining. According to the February 2021 National Defense survey published by the Ronald Reagan Institute, public trust and confidence in the military has dropped from 70% in 2018 to 56% in 2021.<sup>16</sup> The American people afford military members specialized training in tactics, operations, and procedures, give them access to deadly weapons, and entrust them with sensitive secrets. Those who are privileged to join the U.S. military must be held to a higher standard than the general public is. That is why we must stop relying on either anecdotes or generalizations and rigorously determine how great an extremism problem the US Armed Forces actually have.

### **Clarifying the Terms**

We should begin with a precise explanation of what it is that should be assessed or measured. A good starting point is the Intelligence Community’s definition of a domestic violent extremist (DVE). A domestic violent extremist is “an individual based and operating primarily in the United States without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other

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<sup>15</sup> A Message from the Secretary of Defense on Extremism, 19 February 2021; at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bORC7yyfRwA>.

<sup>16</sup> Reagan Institute National Defense Survey, February 2021; at <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan-institute/centers/peace-through-strength/reagan-institute-national-defense-survey/>.

foreign power and who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence.”<sup>17</sup>

We should also note that the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack met the legal definition of domestic terrorism in U.S. law, Title 18, Section 2331 (5), which names acts that “appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”<sup>18</sup> Whatever else we might call it, the January 6<sup>th</sup> violence visited on the U.S. Capitol was domestic terrorism, and some of the perpetrators of the violence were current or former members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Domestic Violent Extremists can represent different ideologies, including racist White supremacist/anti-ethnic (including anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-Hispanic, anti-Semitic), neo-Nazi, anti-government, anti-technology, anarchist, anti-fascist (Antifa), and conspiratorial fringe (such as QAnon). In addition to those already mentioned (Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters), relevant groups or movements include Incels, Kenosha Guard, and the Boogaloo movement. (This is not a comprehensive list.) In recent years, the vast majority of domestic violence has come from violent right-wing extremists, including White supremacists and anti-government individuals and groups. According to the Anti-Defamation League, violent right-wing extremists committed 76% of the 435 U.S. terrorism-related deaths between 2010 and 2019, almost always in mass shooting events using firearms.<sup>19</sup> In the same period, left-wing perpetrators killed 3%.<sup>20</sup>

The United States has a deep history of left-wing extremist violence--also included in the term Domestic Violent Extremist (DVE)--but it is not the main threat now. Historically, U.S. left-wing extremism has erupted in two major spikes: violent Anarchist bombings that peaked between 1905 and 1921, killing scores of Americans;<sup>21</sup> and anti-Vietnam bombings that dominated the 1970s, with almost 1500 incidents.<sup>22</sup> Nothing occurring in association with Black Lives Matter protests and other racial unrest has approached the levels of those periods—or the level of today’s right-wing extremist violence. Linked with left-wing protests in recent months has been property damage (such as the 2020 burning of the Minneapolis Police Department’s Third Precinct building and the fires in Washington, D.C.), one killing (the August 29, 2020

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<sup>17</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*, Intelligence Assessment (unclassified summary), 1 March 2021; at <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Code, Title 18, 2331, Crimes and Criminal Procedures, Definitions #5: “the term ‘domestic terrorism’ means activities that (A) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; (B) appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.” At <https://codes.findlaw.com/us/title-18-crimes-and-criminal-procedure/18-usc-sect-2331.html>. See also “What Happened at the Capitol was Domestic Terrorism, Lawmakers and Experts Say,” *Washington Post*, 7 January 2021; at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2021/01/07/domestic-terrorism-capitol-mob/>.

<sup>19</sup> Anti-Defamation League, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2019,” Center on Extremism, February 2020, p. 12; at <https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2019>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>21</sup> Cronin, *Power to the People* (2020), pp. 116-120.

<sup>22</sup> Search for 1970-79, United States, all incidents, in the Global Terrorism Database at <https://start.umd.edu/gtd/>.



murder of a pro-Trump demonstrator in Portland by a self-professed Antifa supporter and veteran, who was then killed by police), and several other attempted attacks that were intercepted by police.<sup>23</sup> Apart from the August killing in Portland, I can find no additional public examples of left-wing extremist violence associated with current or former members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

## How to Respond

### *Address an Absence of Data*

The most immediate problem in determining how to handle extremism in the military is an absence of good data. Military-connected right-wing extremist violence is not a new phenomenon—the most notorious example is Timothy McVeigh, Army veteran of Desert Storm. McVeigh killed 168 people in the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. That same year, three White soldiers were convicted of killing a Black man and woman outside Fort Bragg, North Carolina. On investigation, it emerged that the three were neo-Nazi skinheads, and the killing had been motivated by a desire by the triggerman to earn a spider web tattoo, a sign that the wearer had killed a Black or LGBTQ person.<sup>24</sup> Secretary of Defense Austin was then a lieutenant colonel overseeing operations in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, the unit all three perpetrators were in, and he has pledged to take the same approach to root out violent extremism and racism today.<sup>25</sup>

The 2021 Capitol insurrection leaves the impression that the number of extremists in the military is increasing. Yet, in recent years, military officials have also repeatedly claimed that the number of extremists in the ranks is small. In 2018, in response to a Congressional request by then-Representative Keith Ellison, the Pentagon conveyed that there had been 27 reports of extremist activity by Service members over the previous five years.<sup>26</sup> That is a minimal number. The DoD backs that impression up with an annual report to Congress that includes only the small number of disciplinary cases that arise independently.<sup>27</sup> No one at the Pentagon tracks or monitors extremism aggressively and systematically, across all military Services, military law enforcement, and investigative bodies.

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<sup>23</sup> For a full description of these incidents, see Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “Terrorism and Counterterrorism Challenges for the Biden Administration,” *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 2021; at <https://ctc.usma.edu/january-2021/>, pp. 4-6.

<sup>24</sup> “2<sup>nd</sup> Ex-Soldier is Sentenced to Life in Slaying of 2 Black Victims,” *Chicago Tribune*, 13 May 1997; at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-05-13-9705130165-story.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Sonne and Missy Ryan, “As He Tackles Extremism, Lloyd Austin Draws on Military’s Experience Dealing with 1995 Racially Motivated Murders,” *Washington Post*, 31 January 2021; at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/as-he-tackles-extremism-lloyd-austin-draws-on-militarys-experience-dealing-with-1995-racially-motivated-murders/2021/01/30/64c450ee-5c0d-11eb-aaad-93988621dd28\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/as-he-tackles-extremism-lloyd-austin-draws-on-militarys-experience-dealing-with-1995-racially-motivated-murders/2021/01/30/64c450ee-5c0d-11eb-aaad-93988621dd28_story.html).

<sup>26</sup> Shawn Snow, “27 Reports of Extremist Activity by U.S. Service Members over the Past 5 Years, DoD Says,” *Marine Corps Times*, 13 September 2019; at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2019/09/13/27-reports-of-extremist-activity-by-us-service-members-over-the-past-5-years-dod-says/>.

<sup>27</sup> Dave Philipps, “White Supremacism in the U.S. Military, Explained,” *The New York Times*, 27 February 2019; at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/us/military-white-nationalists-extremists.html>. An effort by former representative Keith Ellison to elicit information about known activities in the military yielded a letter with two dozen names and no indication of which had been removed from the military for white supremacy.

To move us toward a better understanding of extremism in the military—whether it is a large number or a small number—we must measure it comprehensively. Currently, no centralized data are collected across DoD Services and agencies to measure allegations, disciplinary infractions, discharges, or reprimands related to extremism. We do not know how many people are identified as extremists in the military and how many incidents or crimes they commit.<sup>28</sup> Decisions on discharges and penalties are handled by commanders, individually, on a case-by-case basis. Military leaders like to say that you cannot fix what you cannot measure, and no serious plan can be built without defining the scope of the problem.

### ***Build Common Standards or Rules across DoD***

Part of the challenge facing military leaders is the difficulty of walking a fine line between Service members' Constitutional protections of free speech and freedom of assembly, on the one hand, and enforcing good order and discipline, on the other. Protecting the Constitutional rights of military members is the right thing to do. It is also important to avoid strengthening the narrative of right-wing anti-government groups and militias. It is generally against the law to criminalize membership in political organizations. Further, most of the Services have rules permitting members to join extremist organizations as long as they do not become “active” members, meaning they do not fundraise, recruit, or participate in illegal activities. But rules regarding what exactly members can and cannot do vary from Service to Service, as does enforcement of those rules.

To begin with, there is no consistent definition of domestic violent extremism in the Department of Defense. Good definitions are available in other parts of the U.S. government, however. They just need to be adopted and standardized within DoD.

Second, there are inconsistent policies across the Department of Defense in determining what extremist activities are, what should happen to Service members who engage in them, and how significant a problem there is. For example, the Navy has a regulation covering “separation by reason of supremacist or extremist activities” including illegal discrimination or “advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government or agency thereof, in violation of federal, state or local laws.”<sup>29</sup> It has an extremism discharge code but it does not track such violations or know how many sailors it has sanctioned or discharged under that offense.<sup>30</sup> The Army has regulations against extremism, and soldiers who violate them can be punished or discharged. Still, incidents are filed under “misconduct,” there is no discharge category for extremism and no way to know how many extremists it has sanctioned or discharged.<sup>31</sup> The Air Force uses the term “impermissible behavior,” discharges members for

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<sup>28</sup>Bryan Bender, “The military has a hate group problem. But it does not know how bad it’s gotten,” *Politico*, 11 January 2021; at <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/11/military-right-wing-extremism-457861>.

<sup>29</sup> Geoff Ziezulewicz, “The Navy Has No Idea How Many Sailors It Has Booted for Extremist Activity,” *Navy Times*, 11 February 2021; at <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2021/02/11/the-navy-has-no-idea-how-many-sailors-it-has-booted-for-extremist-activity/>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Kyle Rempfer, “The Army Doesn’t Know How Many Extremists It Has Booted,” *Army Times*, 19 February 2021; at <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2021/02/19/the-army-doesnt-know-how-many-extremists-it-has-booted/>.



misconduct, and does not track overall statistics. There should be one military separation code for discharge that has a standard definition and is trackable across all the Services.

There is hope that these department-wide discrepancies might be rectified soon. On December 17th, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller tasked the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness to review current policy, laws, and regulations concerning active participation by Service members in extremist or hate group activity and produce a report by June 30, 2021. Hopefully, this document will highlight the Services' disparities in how they define and enforce their regulations, lay out steps to institute comprehensive data collection, and set milestones for progress across the entire department. Secretary Miller also directed the Office of General Counsel and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs to review the Uniform Code of Military Justice and develop proposed language for an update to Address Extremist Activity in the military, due on July 31, 2021.<sup>32</sup> These are both promising initiatives.

Third, another thing that hobbles the military in dealing with this threat is fuzziness in identifying which organizations are dangerous. For foreign terrorists, or at least those with foreign ties, there is a government-wide Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list of terrorist groups formally designated by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (P.L. 104- 132). The Secretary adds organizations to the list if they meet three criteria: 1) the organization is foreign; 2) the organization engages in terrorist activity; and 3) the terrorist activity threatens the security of U.S. citizens or the national security of the United States.<sup>33</sup> FTO designation is a process coordinated with the State, Justice, Homeland Security, and Treasury departments. When American citizens join, support, or otherwise provide material support to any organizations on the FTO list, they break the law and may be prosecuted.<sup>34</sup>

There is no such U.S. designation domestically. Service members who join domestic violent extremist organizations are not automatically doing something illegal under U.S. law — one reason for the differences in how the Services treat them.<sup>35</sup> In the Services' regulatory language about extremist groups, militia organizations are usually not mentioned. If there were a recognized list of domestic organizations, perhaps a "DTO" or "DVEO" list, then the Armed Forces would have legal clarity in pursuing those who join or support organizations that appear on it. Being on such a list would also stigmatize the group and counterbalance narratives about joining a "patriot army" or "saving our country" that could try to reframe and distort the violent

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense, "Actions to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military," Memorandum for Senior Pentagon Leadership, 17 December 2020, pp. 4-5; at <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/18/2002554854/-1/-1/0/ACTIONS-TO-IMPROVE-RACIAL-AND-ETHNIC-DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION-IN-THE-U.S.-MILITARY.PDF>.

<sup>33</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, *The 'FTO List' and Congress: Sanctioning Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, CRS Report for Congress, #RL32120, 21 October 2003.

<sup>34</sup> 18 U.S.C. 2339B.

<sup>35</sup> In this regard, President Trump's May 2020 promise that left-wing Antifa would be designated as a terrorist organization is difficult to understand, as the Secretary of State is responsible for FTO designations under the law, and there is no equivalent designation for domestic groups. At a minimum it would have invited legal challenge.

attacks on the U.S. Capitol. The Department of Homeland Security or the FBI would be the logical counterparts to the U.S. State Department in such a designation process.

Any law or policy action that might infringe on personal liberties needs to be approached with the utmost care, and devising a new domestic designation process in our polarized political context would, of course, be very difficult. But we should at least concede that, unlike in the foreign realm, the Pentagon has no national legal guidelines for identifying domestic violent extremist organizations. Its challenges reflect the challenges of the American political context.

### ***Make Addressing Extremism a Long-term Priority***

The U.S. military is very good at tackling personnel problems that they prioritize. Military commanders and lawyers pursued the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy against lesbian, gay and bisexual service members with ruthless efficiency, discharging more than 13,000 service members in the seventeen years the policy was in effect (1993-2011).<sup>36</sup> They also did so with child pornography and have begun to make progress in addressing, tracking, reducing, and prosecuting the serious problem of sexual assault and harassment.<sup>37</sup> In short, after recognizing and measuring the scope of a personnel problem, the U.S. Armed Forces are fully capable of putting in place effective long-term measures to address it.

The only way to address extremism comprehensively and effectively is to put a bureaucratic structure in place and ensure adequate oversight to follow through.<sup>38</sup> Putting a short-term task force in place could help identify the status of the problem now, but it will not signify the long-term commitment of attention and resources to solving it. The best way to ensure change is to have a person responsible for sustained oversight across DoD. This could either be a confirmable Assistant Secretary of Defense (under the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness) or a long-term senior-level civilian appointed to be directly responsible for tracking, addressing, and monitoring progress reducing extremism across Services and Agencies. When it takes a personnel problem seriously, the U.S. military may be the most effective organization in the world at putting systems in place to correct it.

### ***Improve Education and Training***

Addressing the problem will also require longer-term, serious training of military members at different levels. Beginning with senior Commanders, most do not know the rapidly changing digital ecosystems of extremist groups. They do not have the most up-to-date information and often do not know where to find it. There should be a standardized, military-wide online database of symbols, memes, slogans, social media and website platforms,

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<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “Report of the Comprehensive Review of the issues Associated with a Repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’,” 30 November 2010, p. 23; at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/dont-ask-dont-tell/DADTReport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/dont-ask-dont-tell/DADTReport_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Army Secretary Releases Results of Fort Hood Review, 8 December 2020; and Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee, 6 November 2020; both at <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2440007/army-secretary-releases-results-of-fort-hood-review/>.

<sup>38</sup> Doyle Hodges, Bureaucratizing to Fight Extremism in the Military, *War on the Rocks*, 10 February 2021; at <https://warontherocks.com/2021/02/bureaucratizing-to-fight-extremism-in-the-military/>.

connected to the FBI and civilian law enforcement for regular updates, easily accessible to military investigators, military law enforcement, and commanders.

In addition, active-duty military members should have regular, periodically updated digital literacy training aimed at making them less susceptible to online misinformation, disinformation, and active recruitment. This is important not just for the extremist threat but it is an essential element of defense against a broad range of information operations. The problem of digital literacy is another broad societal problem. Still, it should be aggressively tackled by the U.S. Armed Forces, who are held to higher standards of behavior and directly targeted by domestic violent extremist groups.

### ***Work More Closely with Veterans Organizations***

A most difficult challenge is how to address the role of former military members, who are part of civilian society and thus subject to civilian courts' judgment. Many former military members naturally yearn for the deep connection they had with their military teammates and colleagues, for the agency, camaraderie, and sense of mission they valued in the military. DVE militia groups consciously play upon that desire for comradeship. This has been particularly difficult during the pandemic, with its widespread shutdowns, intense economic suffering, and personal isolation.

Still, the Services could work more closely with veterans' groups to find better ways to connect former members to each other and to their communities, to seek productive civic roles after they leave the Service. Providing support for our veterans, to help them reintegrate into civilian society, is a national security imperative. It is important to remember that many of the law enforcement personnel who protected the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> were also former military members.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Learn from Our Allies***

Our partners and allies have dealt with the problem of extremism in the military, and we should learn from their experiences. In the mid-to-late 1990s, the Norwegians and the Swedes established programs to reverse a range of types of domestic violent extremism, including neo-Nazis, neo-fascists, and White supremacist groups. Norwegian Exit programs began in 1995 and have had impressive success in reducing the problem among young adults. Exit Sweden was established in 1998 and it relies upon a large number of former members of extremist groups, lending credibility and adding to its effectiveness. The Swedish program trains networks of professionals such as teachers, counselors, police and social workers who know the warning signs that an individual might be at risk. They also rely heavily on former members speaking and sharing their stories with others who could be at risk.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Robinson and Kori Schake, "The Military's Extremism Problem is Our Problem," *The New York Times*, 2 March 2021; at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/02/opinion/veterans-capitol-attack.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Casie Elizabeth Daugherty, "Deradicalization and Disengagement: Exit Programs in Norway and Sweden and Addressing Neo-Nazi Extremism," *Journal for Deradicalization*, Winter 2019/20.

The Germans have deep experience with the challenge of Nazi ideology and extremism in their military and law enforcement organizations, but also a long history of coping with left-wing radicalization and violence. DoD could examine the lessons of disengagement and deradicalization programs such as the German Institute on Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies (GIRDS) in order to build greater expertise within DoD on the range of push and pull factors to monitor among the ranks.<sup>41</sup>

This summary barely scratches the surface of a complex topic; however, our DoD leaders might consult with our allies to understand the best approaches (and the pitfalls to avoid) in rehabilitating and reintegrating those who are captured (or might potentially be captured) by dangerous extremist ideologies.

### ***Recognize and Address the Role of Digital Technology***

There is no avoiding the need to engage in stronger and more comprehensive screening of social media and website use for active-duty military members. Permission to access that information is already provided through the clearance process, so this is not a significant expansion of intrusiveness.

It does not make sense for every other business or private organization in the United States to be able to routinely vet its prospective employees by accessing their open-source social media and internet activity, but not the Department of Defense. Periodic monitoring of social media and website behavior can be enabled by the use of algorithmic tools to search for red flags including memes, key words, and organization names. These can help identify those who violate the prohibition on active participation in extremist groups. The role of digital technology is crucial to this problem.

We have experienced an enormous change in the scale and scope of access to individuals online. Everyone has a powerful computer not just on their desks but in their pockets. In recent months, online radicalization has become much easier and faster, facilitated by the heavy dependence upon technology during the pandemic. It used to take people at least 18 months to be radicalized. Now we are seeing radicalization in a matter of weeks.

There is also greater potential for our military members to be individually recruited and groomed. Algorithms help people discover other groups or movements with which they might have affinity—in the United States, groups like Proud Boys, Kenosha Guard, and the Boogaloo movement or self-proclaimed anarchists, Antifa and Black Bloc adherents.<sup>42</sup> And online sites like 4chan, 8kun, Telegram, Reddit, and Discord, among others, have all boosted militia movements in places like Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Oregon.

The digital environment has enhanced the ability of individuals and extremist groups to radicalize other people for violence, to have exceptional reach, and to integrate complex tactical

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<sup>41</sup> See, in particular, Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Hoffman and Ware, “Terrorism and Counterterrorism Challenges for the Biden Administration,” *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 2021; at <https://ctc.usma.edu/january-2021/>, p. 6.

systems. In the twentieth century it required a national army to do all three of these things—mobilization, power projection, and systems integration. Now individuals or small groups, including terrorists and extremists, can do them all.<sup>43</sup> They do not have to be able to go toe-to-toe with our military to dissipate our strength and cohesion from within. If we don't address the effects of a challenging digital landscape, we will never get on top of this problem.

## **Conclusion**

Only two things can truly defeat the U.S. Armed Forces: undermining the American people's trust, and cleavages within the ranks. Every other enemy can be met with unity, determination, effectiveness and success. Perhaps the silver lining of the horrible specter of the storming of the U.S. Capitol will be the determination to address extremism among the U.S. Armed Forces in a profound and lasting way. To do that, we need comprehensive information, planning, and action, to include measures I have tried to outline in this testimony.

Again, I thank you for the honor and privilege of being a witness at this hearing.

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<sup>43</sup> This argument is more fully developed in Cronin, *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists* (2020).